

"BE NOT CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD"

F-33
B2612r
COPY 1

ALUMNI LIBRARY,
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,

PRINCETON, N. J.

Case, Division F-33

Shelf, 661 B2612r

Book, copy 1

No.

SEA
1029

54-6
2













THE RULE OF CHRISTIANITY,

IN REGARD TO

CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD:

A

S E R M O N ,

DELIVERED IN THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN
PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 4, 1833.

BY ALBERT BARNES.

PHILADELPHIA.

PUBLISHED BY HARRISON HALL.

No. 47, South Third Street.

1833.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS Sermon is printed at the request of a few friends of the Author, in the hope that it may be the means of promoting a correct view of an important law of the Christian religion.



A SERMON, &c.

And be not conformed to this world.—Rom. xii. 2.

I do not know a more difficult passage in the New Testament than this; and I enter upon the discussion of it with very little hope of being able to furnish a satisfactory solution of the many inquiries which may be made respecting its meaning, and its application. What is conformity to the world—is the question which immediately presents itself on reading the text. It is easy to see that a command so plain as this appears to be, may give occasion to a great variety of

opinions. Every Christian may have an "interpretation," and "a doctrine" of his own. Every Christian denomination may have its own rules. One will insist on confining it to the feelings and general spirit of the man; another will maintain that it refers only to the *vices*, and pomp and crimes of the world; a third will extend it to its gaieties; a fourth will affirm that it extends to every article of apparel; and a fifth to the ordinary intercourse, and courtesies of life. Many will demand that the rich shall abandon their houses, and their furniture, and their equipage, and come down in all these things to the level of their neighbours. And many of the rich may deem their neighbours unduly self-indulgent in their manner of life. All of us can see some things in which we judge others to be too much conformed to the world; and most of us have many perplexing questions pertaining to our own duty as Christians, and to the demands

of this and other similar texts of the Bible. Most of us are probably satisfied that there has been, and is, in the Church too much conformity to the world. Our fellow men who are not Christians, often reproach us on this subject, and demand that we should be *less* conformed to the follies and vanities in which *they* freely indulge. Poor compliment they pay to their own conduct and discretion; and a sad employment to blame others for that which *they* feel at liberty to practise.

Amid these conflicting opinions, I have little hope of traversing a perplexed and difficult inquiry, with entire clearness and satisfaction. If I can excite *thought* on the subject among conscientious men, one part of my object will be gained. If I can establish some *principles* by which we are to interpret the text, I shall do all that I hope to be able to effect. I need not add that what I shall advance is submitted only to

your candid inquiry. It would be easy to declaim on this subject; and it is always easy to utter unmeaning and loose denunciations against Christians for conformity to the world. And there *may be* occasion for all the severity of reproof ever uttered; but after all, the inquiry arises *what is the duty* of Christians, and by what principles shall they judge of the text?

The following inquiries I shall attempt to answer—

I. To what does the rule apply?

II. What *is* the rule? or what is it designed to reach and effect?

III. What are the proper principles of its application?

1. To what does the rule apply? Here, also, many questions might be asked? Was it intended to *be limited* to the time of Paul, and to that peculiar age of the world? The world then was idolatrous. Christians, especially at Rome, were placed amid the

luxuries and gaieties of a refined, a vicious, and an idolatrous age. To conform to *that* age, would be to coincide with the splendor, pride, ambition, fashion, and even corrupt principles of a generation peculiarly wicked and vain. Christians were expected to be separated, and to constitute a distinct community. The difference between them and others was to be marked, open, decided, and there could have been little difficulty in applying the rule.

But the aspect of the world has, in some respects changed. Idolatry is banished. Its altars are overthrown. Christianity has diffused intelligence, refinement, kindness, and a thousand kindred virtues through the community. It has elevated society, much nearer to its own standards. And it is asked whether the rule is still to be applicable? If so, in what respects, and to what extent? Yet on the question of the applicability, or jurisdiction of the rule, there can be no

doubt. It is unrepealed. There was no intimation that it was to be confined to *that age*, or to any peculiar age. It involves also a principles of Christian conduct as applicable to one time as another. Other directions respecting Christians have a similar meaning. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." 1 John ii. 15, 16. "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Matt. vi. 24. "For do I now persuade men or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Gal. i. 10. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity

with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." James iv. 4. The text, is therefore, manifestly a precept of the divine law, that is to extend its jurisdiction over all the times, and places, and circumstances to which it *may* apply, until the peculiar community, called the *world*, shall be extinct. It extends to all Christians.

But if applicable to all times, to what class of actions does it apply? Is it to the dress, the mind, the heart, the demeanor, the conversation, or to all? Is it to be limited to *one* class of these objects, and then to cease in its influence, or is it to extend every where? I answer, it is like all other divine laws. They are given in a *general* manner, and are to be interpreted on the same principle. The general principle of the laws of God is, that they are *first* to be applied to the *heart* and conscience, and then to *follow out* all the conduct, and extend their jurisdiction over all. Human law is satisfied if it can con-

trol the *external* deportment, and preserve the peace and prosperity of the community. Divine law, extends its purpose of control to the *heart*. If that is right, it supposes *all* is right. If a proper influence can be exerted over that, it supposes that *all* will be well. And the text is evidently one of the laws of Christian conduct, enacted on this principle. The *terms* of the law are applicable either to the mind, or to the external deportment; to the feelings, opinions, and principles of action, as well as to the dress, and conduct of life. Its direct aim therefore, is the heart; its indirect, and complete aim is reached only when it controls the entire deportment.

It is still asked *what place* in the code of Christian laws is this rule designed to occupy? Here I answer, 1.—The design of *this* law is not to keep Christians from open vice and crime. That is placed on better defined ground; and it is presumed that

Christians cannot commit them. Those things which are absolutely and grossly evil, are made the subjects of express statute. Crime is specified, and absolutely forbidden. It is not left to a rule so easily perverted ; so capable of abuse, and variation, as the simple injunction, not to be conformed to the world. It is expressly declared that men shall *not* be idolaters, or profane, or Sabbath-breakers, or haters of their parents, or liars, or adulterers, or thieves, or drunkards, or revilers, or false witnesses, or covetous. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Gal. v. 19, 21. Eph. v. 4. 5. Heb. xii. 14. xiii. 4. Rev. xxi. 15. Ex. xx. Whatever may be the conduct of the world on these subjects, the law of God is positive, and explicit. And it is perfectly obvious that any thing pertaining to open *sin* and *vice*, *must be* under the control of such absolute and unchanging statutes. 2. The command in question is not designed to teach Christians that they should not coincide with

the world *in any respect, or on any subjects*. It is not to be considered as enjoining *singularity for the sake of singularity*. Such a purpose would be unworthy any legislator. Unless the thing forbidden was either wrong in itself, or was attended with bad consequences, it would be the evidence of tyranny or caprice, not of wisdom, to demand separation. The conformity then, is to be presumed to be in those things which would be *injurious* to the object which the lawgiver had in view. The matter of fact is, that there are many things in which Christians and others may, and must, externally at least, coincide ; and in which to affect singularity, would be to countenance evil. When the Apostle directs Christians to think of what soever things are true and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of *good report* ; of virtue, and of that which is praiseworthy, (Phil. iv. 8.) he evidently supposes that in these things Christians are to coincide with

others. Thus in industry, charity, temperance, courtesy, meekness, order. 2 Thes. iii. 10. Rom. xii. 10, 11, &c. 1 Peter ii. 17, iii. 8. 1. Rom. xiii. 7, 8. Gal. v. 22. If the men of the world are industrious, Christians are not to be directed to be idle; if they are temperate, Christians are not to be intemperate; if they are courteous, and refined, Christians are not to affect rustiness, or to violate the proper rules of refined intercourse. On these, and a thousand kindred subjects, Christians and the world are to coincide, nor does religion, common sense, or good morals, demand or *permit* singularity. But 3. There is a large class of objects and actions which come under *neither* of these denominations, which are not fixed by absolute statute, and which it might yet be proper to prohibit, or in which there might be demanded a separation from the world. To make laws on them all, would be endless. These actions and feelings, the principle of

the text, is designed to influence and control. The *general principle* is settled, and the application is to be made by the conscience of each Christian, on his own responsibility. These actions pertain to the greater part of our lives and intercourse. It is not often that a man will be called on to apply the statute respecting murder to himself, perhaps never—but the principles of religion pertaining to his daily conduct, need to be carefully applied to the ever varying forms and allurements of the world. You may never have occasion to apply to yourself for example, the ninth commandment; but there is a *large territory* of acts—a vast field over which *some law* should be extended, which cannot be reached by the decalogue, or by any direct statute. Such are all those acts and emotions pertaining to dress and style of life; to modes of intercourse; to gaiety and fashion, and equipage, to the governing purposes of the heart in relation

to our intercourse with men ; to the rules of business ; to the aim of life ; and to that endless variety of things in which the men of the world perceive it no harm for them to indulge, and in which they indulge freely. Now over this broad *territory*—this vast and ever varying presentation of objects and things, God has left the simple direction, “be not conformed to the world.” The principles of actions and of life, are not to be formed by the opinions of the world. The rule is designed to occupy this vast region of thought and feeling, over which there could not be the formality of express statute for every thing. It is a kind of balance wheel to the whole, to preserve it in order ; and a general direction, that in relation to all these things, the opinion and conduct should not be formed by the views of the men of the world, but by other principles. The law then, I suppose, is one not confined to the age of Paul ; not applicable

to any single class of objects ; not designed to control things in themselves absolutely criminal, and subject to express statute ; not designed to promote singularity for the sake of singularity ; and to separate Christians from the world, in things which are proper ; but designed to reach and control the conduct, the feelings, and deportment, in that vast variety of things which the world may present from age to age as objects of pleasure, gaiety, business, luxury, splendor, or ambition.

II. Our second inquiry is, what the rule is ? A few remarks may enable us to understand this.

1. There is a *difference* contemplated between Christians and other men—a difference pertaining to principles of action, to feelings, to laws, to destiny. 1 Cor. iv. 7. 2 Cor. vi. 14, 17. Isa. lii. 11. Rev. xviii. 4. The whole arrangement by which this difference is produced and promoted, shows

that it is not one of trifling magnitude, or importance. To *produce* it, cost the labours of the Son of God, and is the appropriate work of the Holy Spirit on the soul, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus ii. 14. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." 1 Pet. ii. 9. To advance this work calls into exercise all the means of grace, and all the *direct* operation of God on the human mind. While as men, as citizens, we have many things in common with other men, yet as Christians, we are expected to possess something original and peculiar. There is no change in the human mind so great, thorough, and abiding, as that of regeneration. John iii. 1. 7—compare Eph. ii. 10. iv. 24.

There is no kingdom more different from all other kingdoms, than the empire of Christ over the soul, is unlike all other empires. "My kingdom is not of this world," is his language; (John xviii. 36.) and while we may have many things in common with others, yet as *Christians*, his empire over us is to be regarded as original and peculiar. *His law* is to form our opinions and practice, and his will to influence our conduct. (1 John ii. 3, 6.) The world may be governed by its own laws. The laws of fashion may control one portion; the laws of honour another; of ambition a third. One community may frame its conduct by a set of artificial statutes, meaning or unmeaning, which may have been agreed on respecting the intercourse of the theatre, the ball-room, or any other place of amusement or of business. Another community is under the influence of the laws of honour—so called—and those laws are understood, and capable of being

written down. The *Christian* community rises in the midst of all others—subject to laws of its own, voluntarily assumed, and extending to *all* things, and claiming that their jurisdiction should be admitted to extend over all the thoughts and doings of the life. It claims that no other community should be allowed to *originate* statutes for the government, of Christians, or modify *their* laws, or demand their submission to its mandates. It claims *original* jurisdiction over the whole soul and body, and sternly rebukes the interposition of the communities under the influence of the laws of honour, or fashion, or vice, if they come in with a claim to modify, or repeal the original and independent statutes of the Christian community. Christianity regards all such interference as aggression. If they *coincide* with Christianity in any thing, or in *every* thing, it is well, and Christians are not to *affect singularity*. If they differ, the Christian community has another rule by

which it is governed. Now the essential idea of the rule which I am wishing to explain, is, that Christianity has original jurisdiction in all these cases; that the laws of the New Testament are the last appeal; and that as far as this community is concerned, its statutes are to govern—nor are they to be modified by any intrusions of the laws of any other commonwealth.

I do not know that I present the idea clearly. Let me attempt further to illustrate it. I have a family—in a gay, wicked, thoughtless city. I may be surrounded by families which have different views altogether from those I have on the various subjects of employments and morals. As the head of that family, I give laws, by which I expect it will be influenced. Around me, may be one family governed by the laws of fashion. Another by the laws of honour. A third, perhaps, by certain arbitrary rules, which pick-pockets, and highway-men have

set up. I do not interfere with them ; nor do I say that in *no respects* shall *my* family coincide with them. If *they* have *any thing* commendable, I shall not denounce it ; nor demand that my children shall affect singularity. I shall not demand affected singularity in quaint and unusual modes of speech ; in an inconvenient, or a ridiculous style of dress ; or in an unnatural and forced gait or demeanour ; or in a disgusting or an odious tone of utterance, for the mere *sake* of singularity. I expect my children will fall in with, and obey my original laws, and remember that *I* have the jurisdiction in the premises. If my neighbour presumes to legislate in the case, to demand that *my* family shall forsake my laws ; if he affirms that *my* statutes are stern and harsh, and should be modified—that is a question for me to consider, not for him to legislate on. Just so it is with Christianity. Christ has established a set of laws, and demanded a certain course

of life. If the members of any other community, or of fifty others, should in many things, or in *all* things, coincide with what *religion* would produce, the Christian is not to affect singularity in the case. The question is, whether I am adhering to the laws of the peculiar kingdom by which I am governed, and not whether others are falling in with those laws also. What effect would the Christian religion produce if obeyed by the entire community, and if its principles were suffered to be acted out every where? That is the question; and not what compound and motley system of enactments can be formed into a code, by amalgamating Christianity with the artificial rules which regulate your communities of the gay and fashionable, and of the proud, and ambitious.

Again—Let us take another illustration. Lycurgus framed a code of laws for Sparta. He had an object in his eye in each one of his statutes, and he designed to rear a pecu-

liar community. It was not the love of singularity ; it was not a wish to differ from others for the mere *sake of being* different. It was with reference to his great object—to make the Spartans valiant, hardy, laborious, daring freemen. With this object in his eye, he framed his laws ; and this design was understood by every Lacedemonian. Suppose now he had left some such direction as the text—be not conformed to surrounding nations, or even to the other republics of Greece. The command would have been intelligible. It would not mean, do not in *any* thing coincide with others, for *they* may be temperate, and laborious, and valiant, as well as you, and in this do not affect singularity. *Their* conduct in this respect, is just what is required of you. Do not pursue it *because* they do, but because it will contribute to the great designs of the republic. The command would forbid conformity to other people, if that conformity should

interfere with the purpose of the Spartan lawgiver. It might easily be seen that even the arts of Athens, the extensive attention to statuary and ornamental architecture, might not consist with the main design of the Lacedemonian. Innocent as they might be in themselves, or consistent as they might be in the members of the republic of Athens, yet should the Lacedemonians turn their attention to statuary, or to the fine arts *as a people*, they would abandon the peculiar design of their lawgiver, in making them a hardy and valorous race of freemen. It would easily be seen that the delicacies and refinements of Corinth; its attention to fashion and splendor, its luxuries and amusements, as well as its licentious habits would be inconsistent with the design of the Spartan. Whether they were well *for the Corinthian*, was another question; and a question which it did not pertain to the Spartan to settle. His inquiry was

of a different kind. What was the will of the lawgiver? What was his great design? And are these things consistent with his plain, and obvious directions? His design was to train up a peculiar community; and every member of that community was qualified to judge of that design. He contemplated that no other one—not even one of the confederated republics of Greece, should presume to come in and legislate for his people. If his *peculiar* design was consistent with *their* views and conduct, it was well. They would be conformed to, not because they were the views of *Athens* or *Corinth*, but because they contributed to the great purpose of the *Lacedemonian* lawgiver. In no case had they a right to *originate* laws for his people, or to demand that *his* laws should be conformed to their views.

Thus with the Christian. If the views and conduct of others coincide with *his*, it is well. If they do not, they are not at

liberty to come in and demand that he shall be conformed to them. He has higher laws ; and a higher object. He has a purpose which strikes on to eternity. *His* aim is to prepare for heaven. *Theirs*, to live for time. Nor can they claim jurisdiction over conduct that has been directed by the Son of God, and that *he* has judged best in ordering his peculiar community. The simple question is, whether a proposed course of conduct or opinion, is consistent with the spirit and life demanded by the King of Zion.

The amount of the rule, as I understand it, is, that no other society or authority is *permitted* to originate laws or opinions that shall direct or control the Christian. The first act of his religion, is to submit to the laws of Jesus Christ. Acts ix. 6. xvi. 30. His first movements are to forsake all which God would not approve. No matter from what community they have been derived, they are to be abandoned. Be it from the

society of the vicious, the men of honour, or of ambition, from the pleasure loving, the rich or the gay, or even from a beloved parent or friend, if inconsistent with the pure spirit of the gospel, they are to be abandoned; Acts iv. 19, 20. v. 29, and Luke xiv 26. God is raising up a peculiar community—an empire, amid many other empires; a kingdom in the midst of other kingdoms—a kingdom of seriousness and prayer and love, amid the kingdoms of the gay, and dissipated, and the worldly. His kingdom, though surrounded by others, is designed to be peculiar—not for the love of singularity, but because *all* such designs involve singularity. Thus the Athenian was singular; the Spartan was singular; the Corinthian was singular; the Roman was singular. Thus, too, the votary of pleasure is singular, and the follower of fashion is singular, and the man seeking wealth and honor, has his own views about things, and is peculiar. Each society has its

own laws ; and the kingdom of God is not designed to take its complexion, cameleon like, from surrounding objects, but to derive its peculiar features from the laws of the Son of God. If the Christian community is singular, it is not because God loves singularity, but because the world has gone out of the way, and its maxims are an improper guide for those who are seeking to honour God, and to save their souls. If this be the meaning, therefore, of the rule, we are prepared,

III. To inquire on what principles it is to be applied ?

I might be contented with observing here, that this is the appropriate business of every Christian ; and that God has made him responsible for the honest application of the rule to all his conduct. No small part of our trial consists in ascertaining whether we are disposed faithfully to apply the rule, or whether we are disposed to be governed by

every change of fashion, by every scene of amusement, by all the allurements of gaiety, and of wealth. Whether we are disposed to take the lead in self-denial and humiliations and consistencies of the Christian life ; or whether we are disposed to lead a gay and frivolous, and vain world farther and farther in its wanderings from virtue, from prayer, and from God. It would seem that the rule was of easy application ; and that the examination of ourselves on this head would be one of the least difficult parts of the Christian inquiry. But I may be permitted here briefly to specify a few principles on which the rule is to be applied. Remember here, that I speak to CHRISTIANS—those who belong to that original and peculiar community, which the Son of God came to establish. You will remember also that I claim no infallibility here, or certainty that I am right. I suggest these principles as they seem to me to be demanded by the rule.

1. You are not to regulate your feelings and views, your apparel and manner of living, your conversation and deportment, with a view of *leading* the world in their own ways of vanity, pleasure and ambition. You are not to seek to be distinguished in the manner in which they seek to be distinguished, and for which alone they live. The world is tending to a different destiny from the Christian. It matters little in *what way* they go; whether in the ball-room, the theatre, or any other scene of vice and sin, they are going to their own home, and it is a sad procession however gay or gorgeous, where a Christian moves at the head of a thoughtless throng, that is sporting down to hell.

2. You are not to regulate your opinions and feelings, and conduct, by the people of the world. You are not to approve of a thing because they approve of it; to do a thing because they do it; to love a thing because

they love it ; or to hate a thing because they hate it. You are not to inquire then, *how* they think or feel, or *why* they do it. They have their own views of these things, and you are to have yours—or rather you are to imbibe the views of the Son of God. With the feelings which the world has about the objects of life, a thousand things may be consistent, which would be repugnant to the laws of the kingdom of Christ. While *they* think life is valuable only because it ministers to the appetites, or contributes to pleasure, numberless objects may accord with *their* notions, all which would interfere directly with the design for which the Christian lives, and with the laws by which he is governed. If they have no other object in life but to be amused, or to be caressed or adored, it may be well to deck themselves, and sport over the grave. Their race will soon be run. Their dance will soon be over. So have I seen in the beams of the western

sun, as he sank behind the hills, thousands of gay insects sporting in the departing rays—joyous in the mazy dance, and unconscious that they were in the *last* beams of the parting day—and perhaps in the last fleeting seconds of a very brief existence. Soon the sun withdrew his beams, and darkness came over the earth, and the dance was ended, and perhaps also their life. Another generation may play in those beams to-morrow. But this one is gone. So the gay and thoughtless world moves on to darkness and to death. The scenes of their festivity are soon to end, and darkness will cover them, and they will plunge into the world of judgment—a world where all is serious, solemn, and fixed for eternity. *All* the joy they seek or desire, is included in the brief summer sun of their earthly being—the fast fleeting moments of fashion, pride, and folly here. To seek supremely for adorning, and admiration, to feel comfort in

scenes of gaiety, and of sin, and of amusement, without prayer, and without God, may have a *most melancholy consistency* with their views of human life. But for you who are living for eternity, and looking for an everlasting dwelling in that world which has no need of the moon, nor of the sun, where the Lord God and the Lamb are the light thereof, amid the splendors of that world where the heavens and the earth shall flee away, such amusements and gaieties may be folly; may be worse—may be crime.

3. If in any of your views and deportment, you coincide with the world, it will not be because *they* do it, but because it will be *best*. I know that this principle may be difficult to be understood, and may be abused. Still it may be the correct principle in the case. Let me illustrate it. In many things, as I have remarked, you may coincide with the world. You are industrious. So are they. Your industry is not because the

world requires it, but because it is *best*. It is required by the law of your religion. You are temperate, so may they be. You are temperate, not because this is the *fashion of the world*, but because your *religion* demands it. You are courteous, polite, kind. So may be, externally at least, the people of the world. In this you may coincide. But you are not thus *because they* are. You do not do it, *because* they have originated it, or because they have the right to dictate its forms. You do it because it is the *nature of your religion*. It prompts to kindness, truth, courtesy, tenderness of feelings and character, mutual respect, civility. It enthrones on the *heart* of the Christian what may sit loose in *form* only, around other men. It gives *vitality* to what elsewhere may be *a mere shadow*. And if the world changes its views on this subject, and adopts any system of intercourse, that may consist well enough with *its* views of morals, you are not at liberty to follow it, if

it is a departure from the spirit of Jesus Christ. A mere votary of the world, for example, who has no idea of morals, but a certain artificial and shapeless standard adopted for convenience, may incorporate a thousand falsehoods and evasions in his system, and make a show of deception a part of his well understood rules of intercourse. For his, or her purpose, and in accordance with his or her views of truth, it may be *consistent* enough to say, or instruct a servant to say, that they are not at home, when they *are* at home; or to say that they are sick, when they are *not* sick; or that they are engaged, when they are *not* engaged. For a man or a woman who is devoted to the service of the God of truth, it becomes a different matter. And the question of conformity to the world in this thing, comes up with reference to the inquiry how it will appear before Him who *cannot lie*, and where it will be too late to deceive. You are regular, decent, comely in your apparel,

and your style of living. It is not because the world does it, but it is the nature of religion to produce this in a community. It elevates, refines, produces order, and personal neatness and propriety of living. It does not require the man of wealth to seek the wigwam of the Indian, or the hut of the Laplander. It does not require him to become a hermit; nor would it change the Christian community into monasteries. It does not say that the Christian prince, or man of wealth should cloth himself in rags, or deny himself the ordinary comforts connected with the rank of life where God has placed him. It demands that he should carry out the influence of religion *on that rank of life*—that he should live and act in a certain manner, not because the *world* does it, but because Christian propriety demands it—because if the Christian religion were extended to the *entire* community, there would be men who had wealth, who would still be *Chris-*

tian men; there would be men of professional skill and talent, who would be *Christian men*; and in that rank of life, it would be as easy to apply the principles of the gospel to what a man has, and does, as it would be in a far inferior station. Christ never denounced differences of rank in life. He never engaged in the project of the dissatisfied and disorganizing Roman people, in the demands for an Agrarian law, nor in the covetous schemes of modern infidelity, to break up all ranks in society, to denounce the rich, or to demand that all property should be reduced to a mass to be subject to the arts of a cunning and unprincipled leader. He designed a scheme of religion, adapted to the existence of various orders in the community. And he demanded that the principles of the rich should no more be modeled after the judgment of the world, than those of the poor. Live, and feel, and act in this situation of life, is the language of his gospel, not because a gay and wicked world

requires you to do it, but so as in the best way to evince the influence of the gospel in the rank of life in which you are placed.

4. A fourth obvious principle in which Christians will apply the rule is that their views and feelings will not be prompted by a desire to elicit the applause, and approbation of the world. Your conduct will be regulated by a higher law. It is not to produce admiration, envy, rivalry, flattery, competition, that you live ; it is not to be the subject of conversation, commendation, or praise, it is TO PLEASE GOD. If the kingdom of which you are a member stood alone ; if the empires of this world were removed *en masse* to other abodes, your conduct would then be regulated by the Bible, and the will of God. So should it be now. This is one of the plainest applications of the rule.—And yet if honestly applied, what a sad invasion would it make in the Christian church. Remove from the followers of Christ, all that has been assumed

for the purpose of being admired by one another and by the world ; all that has been the result of envy, and rivalry, all that is adjusted to catch the passing gale of applause ; all that comes under the denomination of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, and a most fearful flight would be given to numberless ornaments ; and a most sad invasion would be made on the style of living in every Christian community. Stripped of the meretricious decorations which the world has persuaded and *enjoined* the church to assume ; dressed in the virgin purity which the Son of God has prescribed for it, it would at once rise to elevated influence, and be clad in beauty and in honor. We are not to be guided by the world. But there is an old Roman maxim, that it is right to be taught by our enemy, “ *fas est et ab hoste doceri.*” And if in any thing it would be right to listen to the people of the world it would be in this ; not what they *wish* us to be ; *but what they*

understand our religion to require. Glad would they be that every Christian should be like themselves. But well do they know that religion demands a difference, a great difference, an eternal difference, and well do they understand that this difference should be manifest in the life. And never do they utter sentiments more worthy of the attention of Christians than when they denounce us as fools or hypocrites for conformity to their own senseless and vain spirit, and opinions, about the scenes of gaiety and ambition—about the theatre, and the ball-room; and the trifles by which *they* continue to amuse themselves in the brief summer sun in which they are moving to a world of wo. Christians have a better inheritance; and much and well do the men of this world marvel, that they find their pleasures in their scenes of gaiety and folly.

5. A fifth principle of the rule. It forbids all mingling with the world which is incon-

sistent with the great objects of the kingdom of Christ, or which will not in the whole tend to promote it. This principle seems also obvious. The desire of obeying him to whom we are devoted, and of promoting his glory, will constitute a rule of action. It is not needful to state what those objects are. They are known to all Christians. They may be summed up in a desire to become personally assimilated to Jesus Christ, and to bring our fellow men to the hope of the same Heaven. It demands of course the spirit of prayer, of seriousness, of self-denial ; the faithful discharge of our duties in all the relations of life ; a conscientious appropriation of our time, our influence, and our wealth ; a faithful meeting of all the demands made on us as Christians and as men. God has given us enough to do ; and if we follow *his* will we shall not be oppressed with useless time, or afflicted with *ennui*. Now with this desire to do precisely *what will be approved by the mind*

of CHRIST we may apply the rule before us. It will be a test of the propriety of a thousand things which might otherwise be the subject of much debate.—It will constitute a nice *act* by which we may approach a great variety of objects without danger of error. A child can much more easily decide whether a thing will be acceptable to the mind of his father, than he could settle its propriety by argument. The inhabitants of Sparta could see at once that many things were inconsistent with the design of his republic which he could by no means settle in an abstract manner. Whether the aim of the Athenian was proper, or the mild and soft pleasures of the Corinthian he might not be able to settle by argument, but they would not be the way to train up the Lacedemonian. So it might become a question of abstract casuistry about a thousand scenes of amusement. It would be easy to argue by the hour in favor of parties of pleasure, and theatres, and ball-rooms,

and gaiety, and all the vanity of fashionable life, and the mind might “find no end in wandering mazes lost.” But apply the rule before us, and all mist vanishes. *Since the beginning of the world, it is to be presumed that no professing Christian, ever dreamed that he was imitating the example of Jesus Christ, or promoting his own Salvation, or the Salvation of others, or honoring the Christian religion in a theatre, or a ball room, or a splendid party of pleasure.* And equally clear would be the decision in reference to multitudes of pleasures which it is needless to specify. If these things were favourable to the designs of the founder of Christianity, they might, and should have been enjoined. But how singular would have been such directions in the New Testament ! How marvellous would appear such a command when placed beside those which enjoin prayer, and spirituality, and humility. and self denial ! If by the patronage of such places a man is promoting the

Christian religion, or the Salvation of his Soul, then they may be lawful. If they will not bear this test they cannot be right, and *may be* dangerous to the Soul.

6. A sixth principle of application of the rule. A Christian should have a spirit and temper *above* the things that influence his fellow-men. Though in the *midst* of these scenes, yet he may not be influenced *by* them. A man may have wealth, and it may be manifest that his affections are not supremely fixed on it. He may be surrounded by a thoughtless world, and yet be evidently living above it. Christianity produces a spirit that is elevated *above* these things; that draws its consolations and its principles of action from far different objects. A man on the throne may be a Christian as really as in a cottage, and he may become a nursing father to the Church, with all the splendor of the "diadem on his brow, and the imperial purple flowing in his train." Thus in all

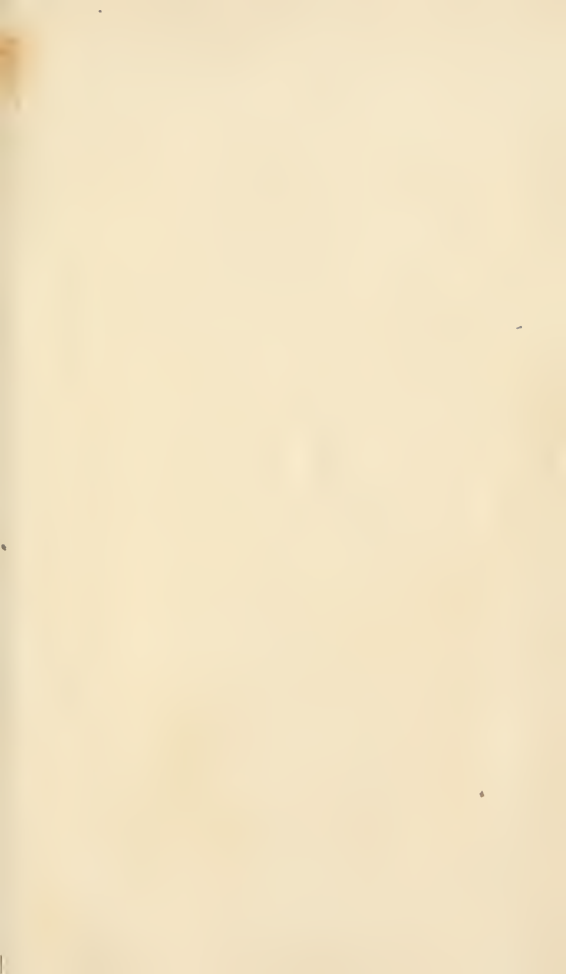
ranks of life it may be manifest that Christianity is uppermost ; that by this the man lives ; that he desires to imbibe its spirit, and to diffuse its blessings around the globe. Rules, you may not be able to give in this, but to the man himself, and to all others, it may be clear that he is actuated by the love of God, and a desire to be useful to a dying world.

Again. A man may be placed in circumstances which require him to be large and liberal, and what to a poorer man might be deemed luxurious or extravagant ; of this no man can be the judge. To his own master he stands or falls. But Christianity may be diffused over all his conduct. He might be as large and liberal in religion as in other things. The men of the world would expend their money solely on banquets, and houses, and equipage. They might court the applause of their fellows, and live for this. In all the conduct, there might be nothing

of the Christian. Now it is clear that the rule in our text demands a different spirit. Let a man be AT LEAST as large and liberal in religion as in other things. Let him evince its spirit in all things. Let him be the liberal patron according to his rank, and station, and wealth, of all that would promote the influence of religion, and the extension of the kingdom of the Son of God in all lands. In all the relations of life, Christianity may be pre-eminent; and the mild and amiable spirit of the gospel may be evinced in every movement, and in every desire of the soul. Thus it is that the spirit of the gospel may as really take up its abode in the mansions of wealth, as in the cottage of poverty; nor is there any reason why it should not reign there, and interweave itself with all the incidents of life, as well as constitute the bright and lively details in the "short and simple annals of the poor." Conformity to the world may exist no more amid those who

are blessed with wealth, than with those in far obscurer life, and the man possessed of the riches of the Indies may as little think of it, or regard it, as those who live by toil from day to day. That religion has ever yet produced its appropriate influence on all those classes of men, we do not maintain. That this rule may not be applied to all classes, none can affirm.

The conclusion, then, to which we have come is, that God has, in this rule, furnished a guide to numberless actions, and to the spirit of the life : a rule which no man should apply to his neighbour, but which every man should honestly and perpetually apply to himself—a rule which you can take to all employments, and amid all the enjoyments of life ; and a rule which may show its influence in the palace and the cottage ; in the movements of the rich and of the poor ; on the throne, and in the obscurest dwelling, where resides a ransomed child of God









THE
LIBRARY OF THE
MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
AND
ZOOLOGY
OF THE
CITY OF LONDON
1871